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C O N F I D E N T I A L HAVANA 000419

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [CU](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: FIDEL ATTACKS U.S. ELECTION PROCESS

REF: A. HAVANA 362

[1](#)B. HAVANA 363

Classified By: COM Michael E. Parmly for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (U) In the May 26 editions of Granma and Juventud Rebelde, Fidel Castro dedicated one of his periodic "Reflexiones" pieces to the U.S. election campaign, focusing on Barack Obama's May 23rd speech on Latin America. Entitled "The Cynical Policy of the Empire," the piece gives faint praise to Obama as a "strong candidate" who has not (yet) been involved in "crimes against Cuba," but in Fidel's regular elliptical style the article becomes a broad-based attack on a U.S. policy that he describes as being bent on imperial domination at least since the proclamation of the Monroe Doctrine.

[1](#)2. (C) Fidel's comments may reflect the regime's concern that the U.S. presidential election campaign is capturing the attention of Cubans all over the island. Far from being turned off by the complex and sometimes messy "show" that is described to them in the official press, Cubans (and our diplomatic colleagues as well) seem fascinated with the US election process this year. Some in the dissident community have commented that the very fact that the Democratic Party primary process involves a black and a female candidate runs counter to the image of racist/sexist U.S. politics that has been inculcated in Cubans through official propaganda for decades. That any one of the major candidates could potentially be elected adds a suspense that would be unthinkable in Cuba's "perfect" democratic elections. Many Cubans we talk to tell us they believe the Castro regime would prefer a McCain victory as it would be more likely to keep bilateral tensions high. Notably, Fidel did not address Senator Clinton directly in his remarks, but instead directed his critical comments at former President Bill Clinton.

[1](#)3. (C) COMMENT: The timing of Fidel's statement was surely thought out carefully. The Cuban propaganda machine has been churning out articles critical of the U.S. election process since last fall. However, with the Cuba week (May 19-23) events generating statements from President Bush to the island, and to him from Cuban dissidents (REFTELS), and with speeches on Cuba by candidates John McCain and Barack Obama, Fidel probably felt it was time to get back in the game. While the regime likes to trumpet Cuba's "true" democracy and dismiss U.S. elections as mere shows created to divert the public, its officials are watching the U.S. election closely too. The same competitiveness that is attracting the attention of ordinary Cubans is likely a cause for concern within the regime. As change comes within Cuba, one constant that could be counted on has been US policy. The certainty of a new US administration, and the possibility of new policies being introduced, is keeping Cuban regime leaders anxious.

PARMLY